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NOTES.

THE ARGENTINA WHEAT SUPPLY.

THE recent and rapid growth of Argentina as an exporter of wool, meats, cereals, and milling products, and the consequent possibilities of the country as a market for manufactured goods, have attracted widespread attention in the commercial world. Several European governments have had commissioners at work studying the conditions in Argentina, and constant efforts are being made to cater to its trade demands. It is, however, of greatest importance as a factor in the world's wheat supply, and the methods of production, the potential wheat area, and its probable development have created the greatest interest and discussion, especially among the wheat-importing and exporting countries.

The Department of Agriculture has recently issued a most interesting monograph on this subject by Mr. Frank W. Bicknell, special agent and agricultural explorer, entitled "Wheat Production and Farm Life in Argentina" (Bureau of Statistics, *Bulletin No. 27*, U. S. Department of Agriculture). The author spent fifteen months in Argentina, and the work is largely the result of his own personal observation. Unfortunately, the collection of reliable agricultural statistics in Argentina has been retarded by lack of appropriations, and by the popular distrust lest the statistical returns should be used as a basis for additional taxation. Consequently Mr. Bicknell has been compelled to depend upon semi-official sources, the newspapers, the returns of thrashing-machine operators, and the estimates of individual farmers. Despite this unavoidable obstacle, however, the monograph is valuable as showing the present conditions of wheat production, and the probable status of Argentina wheat in the future.

The facts presented do not hold out much hope that the wheat-producing resources of Argentina will be fully developed for some time to come. The agricultural population consists of an illiterate and inexperienced class of immigrants, chiefly Italians, who have no permanent interest in the soil, and whose single purpose seems to be to get as much profit from it as possible with the smallest outlay, and then return to their native land. Their methods of farming are

crude and unproductive, and impoverish the soil. Moreover, land is so easily obtained that the supply of farm labor is constantly depleted, and the wheat cannot be properly cultivated and harvested. The facilities for transportation and distribution are also wholly inadequate. There are practically no grain warehouses or elevators along the railroad lines, and the grain must be handled in sacks at great expense and damage. Moreover, the railroads have been unable to furnish a sufficient number of cars, and the average freight rate per ton per mile is more than twice that in the United States. At the seaports the facilities for docking vessels, and for warehousing, loading, and unloading grain, are extremely inefficient and add greatly to the cost of marketing. It is estimated that the entire cost of getting the grain to market averages from 50 to 80 per cent. of its value.

The conclusion is, therefore, that the question of the full development of the wheat-producing resources of the country is one of time, in which the supply and quality of the agricultural labor will be the determining factor. Encouragement is found in considering what has already been done under such adverse conditions. The government is using every means in its power to secure the proper cultivation and marketing of the wheat crop. Wheat-farming is gradually moving to the sections best adapted for it. Warehouses, cars, and better terminal facilities have been promised by the railroads, and the question of supplying the proper facilities for handling and marketing the grain seems easy of solution. The problem, in fact, is one of agricultural labor and scientific farming. An influx of intelligent agricultural immigrants would change the whole situation, but unless an agricultural population can be secured equal in force and intelligence to that which has successfully exploited the resources of Canada and the United States, or unless the present system of cultivation can be vastly improved, the impoverishment of the soil is inevitable. There is, unfortunately, no indication either that a better order of immigrants or more scientific farming will be obtained in the near future. On the contrary, even the present immigrants have been decreasing in numbers during the past few years on account of bad harvests, excessive taxation, and the persecution of provincial officials. Land, climate, and transportation facilities, in short, are available for the extension of a wheat acreage which would place Argentina in the first rank as a wheat-producer and exporter. The labor alone is wanting.